

## Persistence and attainment of first-generation students

*Enrolling in college after completing high school is an expected next step for many young people, especially those whose parents attended college. For students whose parents never attended college (first-generation students), going to college may signify an attempt to improve their social, economic, and occupational standing. Yet these students can encounter a variety of obstacles in their path toward enrollment and degree attainment.*

- Among those who began their postsecondary education in 1989–90, first-generation students were more likely than those whose parents had higher levels of education to be 25 years or older, be married, have dependents, be financially independent of their parents, and start at public 2-year institutions (see supplemental tables 56-1 and 56-2).
- By 1994, about half (55 percent) of 1989–90 first-generation beginning students had earned a degree or were still enrolled in college. However, they were more likely than other students to have not earned a degree or be enrolled in 1994. As parental education level increased, so did the likelihood that students persisted in college.
- First-generation students who initially enrolled in private, not-for-profit 4-year institutions were more likely than those who started in public 4-year institutions to attain a bachelor's degree by 1994. The same was true for students whose parents had higher levels of education.

### Percentage distribution of 1989–90 beginning postsecondary students according to persistence and attainment status as of 1994, by first-generation status and control and type of first institution

First-generation status <sup>1</sup>	Persisted			No degree or certificate, not enrolled	Highest degree attained			
	Attained degree or certificate	No degree or certificate, enrolled	Total	degree or certificate, not enrolled	No degree or certificate	Certificate	Associate degree	Bachelor's degree
All institutions <sup>2</sup>								
Total	50.0	13.3	63.2	36.8	50.1	12.5	11.4	26.1
First generation	44.2	10.7	55.0	45.1	55.3	16.9	11.7	16.0
Parents have some college	50.6	14.5	65.1	34.9	49.8	10.6	11.9	27.7
Parents have bachelor's or advanced degree	58.8	16.9	75.7	24.3	41.2	6.0	11.8	41.0
Public 4-year								
Total	54.8	18.4	73.2	26.8	45.2	3.2	4.7	47.0
First generation	46.4	19.8	66.1	33.9	53.6	5.9	5.7	34.7
Parents have some college	53.3	17.4	70.7	29.3	46.7	1.5	5.0	46.8
Parents have bachelor's or advanced degree	62.3	18.3	80.7	19.3	37.7	2.0	3.6	56.7
Private, not-for-profit 4-year								
Total	71.9	8.6	80.5	19.5	28.1	2.3	3.0	66.6
First generation	62.9	8.2	71.1	28.9	37.1	2.5	2.8	57.6
Parents have some college	70.6	8.5	79.2	20.9	29.4	3.8	4.4	62.4
Parents have bachelor's or advanced degree	77.9	8.6	86.5	13.5	22.1	1.6	2.5	73.8
Public 2-year								
Total	36.7	14.7	51.4	48.6	63.3	12.9	17.5	6.3
First generation	35.4	10.8	46.2	53.8	64.6	14.6	15.1	5.7
Parents have some college	36.8	17.5	54.3	45.7	63.2	10.6	19.3	6.9
Parents have bachelor's or advanced degree	42.2	22.2	64.4	35.6	57.8	9.6	24.5	8.1

<sup>1</sup> The highest educational attainment of either parent was no college for 43 percent of students, some college for 23 percent of students, and a bachelor's or advanced degree for 34 percent.

<sup>2</sup> Includes students at all types of postsecondary institutions, including types not shown separately.

NOTE: Details may not add to 100.0 due to rounding.

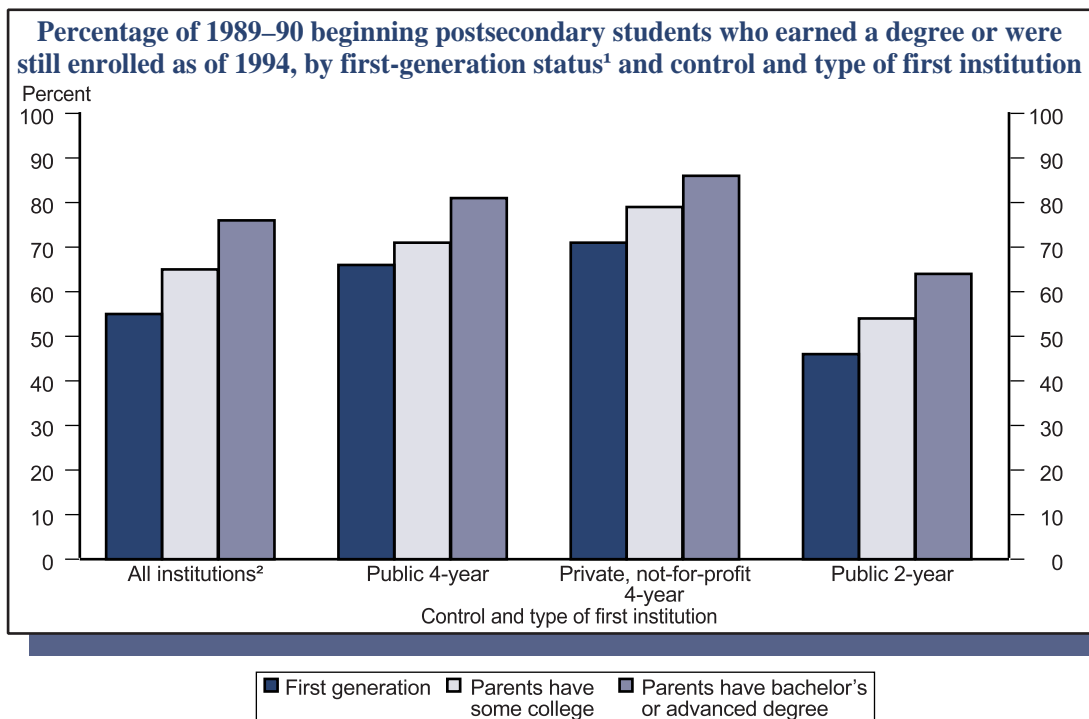
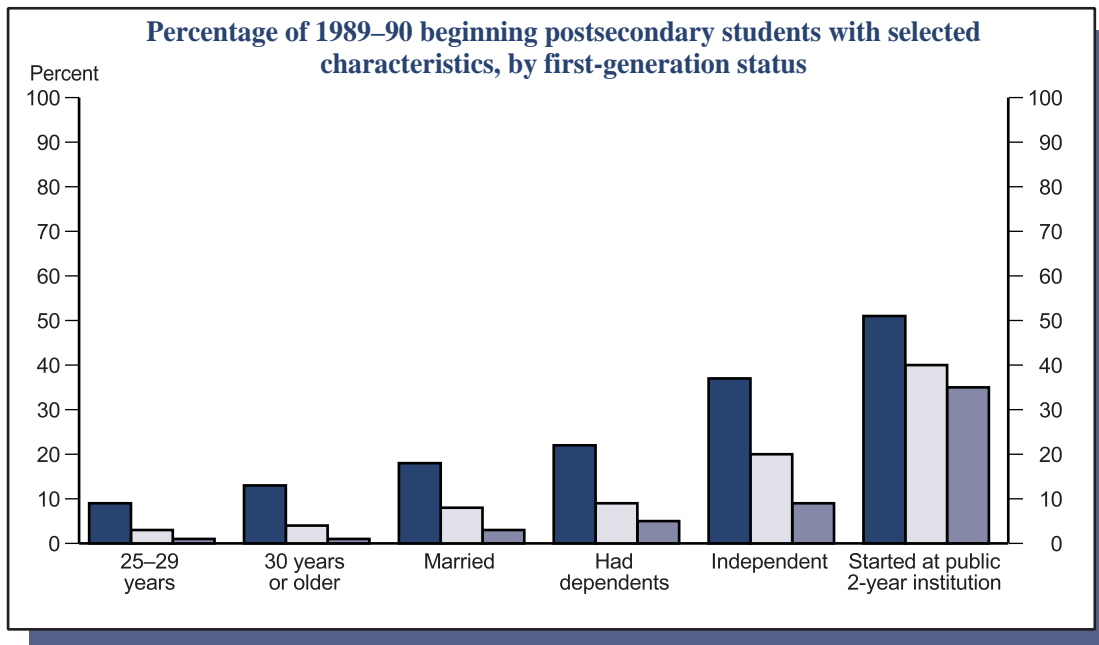
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1989–90 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, Second Follow-up (BPS:90/94), Data Analysis System.

**Table S56** Standard errors for the text table in *Indicator 56*

First-generation status <sup>1</sup>	Persisted			No degree or certificate, not enrolled	Highest degree attained			
	Attained degree or certificate	No degree or certificate, enrolled	Total		No degree or certificate	Certificate	Associate degree	Bachelor's degree
All institutions								
Total	1.1	0.7	1.1	1.1	1.1	0.8	0.8	1.0
First generation	1.6	1.1	1.7	1.7	1.6	1.3	1.1	1.1
Parents have some college	2.0	1.5	2.0	2.0	1.9	1.4	1.5	1.8
Parents have bachelor's or advanced degree	1.6	1.3	1.5	1.5	1.7	0.8	1.2	1.7
Public 4-year								
Total	1.7	1.1	1.4	1.4	1.6	0.5	0.6	1.6
First generation	2.5	1.7	2.3	2.3	2.4	1.3	1.1	2.5
Parents have some college	2.8	1.9	2.4	2.4	2.8	0.6	1.1	2.7
Parents have bachelor's or advanced degree	1.9	1.7	1.5	1.5	1.9	0.5	0.7	1.9
Private, not-for-profit 4-year								
Total	1.7	0.8	1.4	1.4	1.6	0.4	0.4	1.9
First generation	2.6	1.3	2.3	2.3	2.5	0.7	0.8	3.1
Parents have some college	2.6	1.4	2.3	2.3	2.5	1.2	1.1	2.6
Parents have bachelor's or advanced degree	1.9	1.1	1.4	1.4	1.9	0.4	0.6	2.1
Public 2-year								
Total	1.9	1.5	2.0	2.0	2.0	1.4	1.6	1.0
First generation	2.8	1.9	3.0	3.0	2.7	2.2	2.0	1.1
Parents have some college	4.1	3.3	4.4	4.4	4.1	2.6	3.3	2.1
Parents have bachelor's or advanced degree	3.6	3.3	3.6	3.6	3.9	2.3	3.1	2.1

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1989-90 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, Second Follow-up (BPS:90/94), Data Analysis System.

## Persistence and attainment of beginning postsecondary students, by first-generation status



<sup>1</sup> The highest educational attainment of either parent was no college for 43 percent of students, some college for 23 percent of students, and a bachelor's or advanced degree for 34 percent.

<sup>2</sup> Includes students at all types of postsecondary institutions, including types not shown separately.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1989–90 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, Second Follow-up (BPS:90/94), Data Analysis System.

**Table 56-1** Percentage distribution of 1989–90 beginning postsecondary students according to selected student characteristics, by parents' highest education level

Selected student characteristics	Total	First-generation status		
		First generation	Parents have some college	Parents have bachelor's or advanced degree
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Sex				
Male	46.0	42.7	45.6	51.9
Female	54.0	57.3	54.4	48.2
Age in 1989–90				
18 years or younger	61.2	49.4	66.7	79.2
19–24 years	24.3	29.2	25.9	18.2
25–29 years	5.0	8.8	3.1	1.3
30 years or older	9.5	12.6	4.4	1.3
Race–ethnicity				
White	78.8	75.9	79.9	83.1
Black	8.8	9.2	10.7	6.3
Hispanic	7.6	10.5	6.4	4.4
Asian/Pacific Islander	4.0	3.6	2.9	5.3
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0.7	1.0	0.2	0.8
Marital status in 1989–90				
Not married <sup>2</sup>	86.7	80.2	91.5	96.6
Married	12.2	18.0	7.5	3.2
Separated	1.2	1.7	1.0	0.1
Dependency status in 1989–90				
Dependent	74.0	63.0	80.2	91.1
Single independent	10.9	14.9	10.9	4.3
Independent with dependents	15.1	22.1	9.0	4.5
Socioeconomic status in 1989–90 <sup>3</sup>				
Lowest quartile	14.7	23.3	8.2	2.2
Middle quartiles	45.7	58.4	53.6	24.2
Highest quartile	39.7	18.3	38.2	73.7
Educational aspirations in 1989–90				
Trade school	9.1	14.2	8.0	1.9
2-year degree	12.8	18.4	10.6	6.2
Bachelor's degree	35.9	37.7	37.2	33.2
Advanced degree	42.1	29.6	44.2	58.7
SAT total score				
Less than 600	4.6	6.1	4.3	3.8
600–799	21.9	31.2	24.1	15.6
800–999	35.6	36.3	36.7	35.0
1,000–1,199	26.9	22.4	27.8	29.2
1,200–1,399	9.6	3.6	6.1	14.3
1,400 or more	1.4	0.3	1.0	2.1

<sup>1</sup> The highest educational attainment of either parent was no college for 43 percent of students, some college for 23 percent of students, and a bachelor's or advanced degree for 34 percent.

<sup>2</sup> "Not married" includes single, never married; living as married, never married; divorced; widowed; and living as married, previously divorced.

<sup>3</sup> These SES quartiles, defined in the NSPAS:90 data, include not only beginning postsecondary students but also all first-year students. Since students in the BPS:89/90 sample were more likely than other first-year students to be in the highest quartile, the percentage in the highest quartile in the total column is greater than 25.

NOTE: Details may not add to 100.0 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1989–90 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, Second Follow-up (BPS:90/94), Data Analysis System.

**Table S56-1 Standard errors for table 56-1**

Student characteristics	Total	First-generation status		
		First generation	Parents have some college	Parents have bachelor's or advanced degree
Sex				
Male	1.0	1.7	1.9	1.5
Female	1.0	1.7	1.9	1.5
Age in 1989-90				
18 years or younger	1.3	1.8	2.2	1.6
19-24 years	1.0	1.5	2.1	1.6
25-29 years	0.5	1.1	0.8	0.4
30 years or older	0.8	1.2	1.0	0.4
Race-ethnicity				
White	1.2	1.8	1.8	1.4
Black	0.7	1.0	1.4	0.9
Hispanic	0.7	1.3	1.1	0.7
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.5	0.7	0.7	0.8
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0.2	0.4	0.1	0.3
Marital status in 1989-90				
Not married	0.9	1.5	1.4	0.7
Married	0.9	1.5	1.3	0.7
Separated	0.3	0.5	0.5	0.1
Dependency status in 1989-90				
Dependent	1.2	1.8	1.8	1.0
Single independent	0.7	1.2	1.3	0.7
Independent with dependents	0.9	1.6	1.3	0.8
Socioeconomic status in 1989-90				
Lowest quartile	0.8	1.4	1.2	0.5
Middle quartiles	1.0	1.6	2.0	1.5
Highest quartile	1.1	1.3	1.9	1.5
Educational aspirations in 1989-90				
Trade school	0.6	1.2	1.1	0.4
2-year degree	0.8	1.5	1.4	1.0
Bachelor's degree	1.1	1.6	2.1	1.6
Advanced degree	1.0	1.5	2.1	1.6
SAT total score				
Less than 600	0.9	1.7	1.3	1.2
600-799	1.6	3.3	2.6	1.8
800-999	1.9	3.0	2.9	2.5
1,000-1,199	1.5	2.5	2.7	2.1
1,200-1,399	1.4	0.9	1.3	2.2
1,400 or more	0.4	0.2	0.4	0.6

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1989-90 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, Second Follow-up (BPS:90/94), Data Analysis System.

**Table 56-2**      **Percentage distribution of 1989–90 beginning postsecondary students according to type of first institution, by parents' highest education level**

Parents' highest education level*	Public	Private, not-for-profit	Public	Other
	4-year	4-year	2-year	
<b>Total</b>	<b>28.5</b>	<b>13.7</b>	<b>43.7</b>	<b>14.1</b>
High school or less	20.4	8.4	51.2	20.0
Some college	33.9	13.2	40.4	12.6
Bachelor's or advanced degree	37.2	22.1	34.8	6.0

\* The highest educational attainment of either parent was no college for 43 percent of students, some college for 23 percent of students, and a bachelor's degree or higher for 34 percent.

NOTE: Details may not add to 100.0 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1989–90 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, Second Follow-up (BPS:90/94), Data Analysis System.

Table S56-2 Standard errors for table 56-2

First-generation status	Public 4-year	Private, not-for-profit 4-year	Public 2-year	Other
<b>Total</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>1.8</b>	<b>1.0</b>
First generation	1.6	0.7	2.2	1.5
Parents have some college	2.5	1.2	3.0	1.3
Parents have bachelor's or advanced degree	2.3	1.6	2.4	0.8

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1989-90 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, Second Follow-up (BPS:90/94), Data Analysis System.